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To Charles: —

Apologia pro Carminibus Suis

Some tell me my work lacks
a wholesome definiteness of
ideas of life; some tell me
that it must be insincere as
it does not — they say — reflect
my life. May I borrow the
words of Anatole France for my
frail reply?

"To know is nothing at all; to
imagine is everything."

John W. Drapeau

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POEMS

JOHN W. DRAPER



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PREFACE

Most of the poems collected in this volume have already seen the light of print in the *Colonnade*, the monthly publication of the Andiron Club of New York University. The effort of the author has not been to write verses especially adapted to the taste of the modern public, but rather to create "a thing of beauty" from the theme that filled his mind at the time. Often he has been led into somewhat bold innovations such as the invention of the miniature ode, and the associating of an idea with a *rime-motiv* in the metrical short-stories. While he hopes that the new forms will justify themselves, he realizes that after all, the poems must stand or fall in proportion to the amount of pure artistic beauty contained within them.



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
FROM A GRECIAN MYTH	9
"CARPE DIEM"	10
THE SONG OF LORENZO	12
THE SONG OF WO HOU	14
THE AURORA	15
THE WILL O' THE WISP	16
WHEN ON THE SHORE GRATES MY BARGE'S KEEL	18
TO SHELLEY	20
THOMAS DE QUINCEY	21
THE VISION OF DANTE	22
THE SPIRIT OF SCHOPENHAUER	24
ARTHUR TO GUENEVER	26
THE DEATH OF THOMAS CHATTERTON	27
A SPRING SONG	28
AFTER THE NEO-PLATONISTS	29
WHAT WOULDST THOU BE?	30
THE PROPHECY OF DAVID	31
THE PROPHECY OF SAINT MARK	39
THE ÆOLIAN HARP	47
THE MAID THAT I WOODED	48
IN A MINOR CHORD	49
A GLASS OF ABSINTHE	51
THE PALACE OF PAIN	53

POEMS

FROM A GRECIAN MYTH

A palace he built him in the west,
A palace of vermeil fringed with gold;
And fain would he lie him down to rest
In the palace he built him in the west
Which every heavenly hue had dressed
With halcyon harmonies untold:
That palace, the sun built in the west,
A palace of vermeil fringed with gold.

January 3, 1911.

“ CARPE DIEM ”

Wake, love; Aurora's breath has tinged the sky,
Mounting in faintly flushing shafts on high
To tell the world that Phœbus is at hand;
And all the hours in a glittering band
Cluster around in sweeping, circling flight
Like angels bathing in celestial light.

See, now with one great shaft of molten gold,
No longer vaporous haze around him rolled,
The King of Day mounts the ethereal height,
Scattering the last dim streamers of the night.
Bow down, ye Persians, on your altared hills;
Worship the Sun-god who gives life, and fills
Your horn with plenteous blessings from on high.
Wake! Wake! before the dawning sunbeams
die!

Fling incense on your temple's dying flame;
Sing chants and chorals in his mighty name,
For as a weary traveler from afar,
Or as a sailor on the harbor bar
After long absence spies his native town,
So, with benignant brilliance smiles he down;
Or, like a good king ruling o'er his land,
He sprinkles blessings with a bounteous hand.
And thou, O my beloved, wake! arise!
Has not the sun illumined night's dull skies?

Come, Phœbus' breath has tinged the summer
morn.

Come, see the light shafts waver 'mong the corn.

Come, see the early lily's opening bloom.

Come, see the wavering light expel the gloom

From yon dark vale still sunk in misty night.

Oh, watch the circling skylark's heavenward
flight,

As, wrapped in hazy waves of shimmering light,

In one grand Jubilate to the sun,

He floods the sky with song of day begun.

But golden morn is never truly fair

Unless with day, thou com'st to weave my hair

With perfumed flowers gathered in the dell

Where sylphs sing sweetly 'bout the bubbling well.

Oh, fill my cup of pleasure with new wine

Which sparkles only where thy soft eyes shine!

O my beloved, haste thee to arise

Before the light has scorched the noonday skies!

The fleeting hours haste the falling sun;

And soon the hour-glass of life is run.

August 5 & 6, 1911.

THE SONG OF LORENZO

Over thy balcony leaning,
Thy languorous glance floats below
Whence arise thousand odours a-streaming,
Thine incense, O goddess of woe!

A star from the infinite whirling,
Taking flight through the dimness of night,
In an ark through the ether is curling;
And touches thy hair with its light.

O lady of sadness and sorrow,
Mine anguish, my hope, my despair,
Will the bright-dawning day of to-morrow
Find thee still in that balcony there?

Near thy casement, an ancient vine groweth,
A ladder that leads thee below;
Were it not for that vine, ah, who knoweth
Thou wert not an *angel* of woe?

Come down from thy cloud-bosomed chamber;
Not yet has the moon lit the sky;
On the vine-trellis, carefully, clamber —
(Is it thou or the wind that doth sigh?)

Among the copse hedges then darting
Like a ghost at the dawn of the day;
Then, far in the distance departing,
In triumph, I'll bear thee away.

October 7, 1911.

THE SONG OF WO HOU

From the Second Act of Kwang Hsu

List, O list to the song I sing
To the varying note of the sighing breeze
Blowing in cool, refreshing waves
From the endless realm of the seven seas:

Waste not life in pursuit of war,
Holding the nations for one short day,
For the death of the king destroys the realm
Which vanishes like the great Mongol's sway.

Nor hoard up silver in thy vaults,
For the silver once spent, the pleasure is passed,
Or before it is spent, we will mourn thy death:
In the world, neither conquest nor silver last.

Seek, O seek but an hour's joy;
Pleasure and love though they may not endure
Will soothe life's sorrow and bitterness —
The present alone of all time is sure!

Live in the circle of mine arms;
Live in the light of the love in mine eye;
Live in the music of my song;
And, as the music of my song — die!

October 22, 1911.

THE AURORA

Night in purple fringed with the faintest crimson

Conquered the slowly paling glow of sunset;
Softly the western light expired; and yet
Came there no stars forth —

O'er the tow'ring cliffs and the vales and waters,
O'er the whisp'ring woodland of swaying hemlocks,

O'er the streamlets trickling down on the crag-rocks,

Came there no moon forth.

Rose in distance, a dim and fearful spectre;
Rose, accompanied by the forest's singing,
An omen of evil, certainty bringing
Of the divine wroth —

Far from northern forests descends some army;
Far in the heavens, their fires are reflected;
Waver the lights in an archway collected,
Sign of divine wroth —

Shines the arch in a flick'ring wavy brilliance;
Lighting earth from its quivering span of silver;
Shines the Aurora soft o'er lake and river,
Shines from the far north.

December 8, 1911.

THE WILL O' THE WISP

Over the moorland, over the moor,
Sibilant sounds the rain-storm's sneer,
Sneeringly sounds, yet with a lure
Like the lure of the mermaids of the mere,
Calling the fishermen into their snare —
Through watery veils, my dim eyes peer,
Where can a light or a path be, where?
Lost on the moor, the moorland drear —
Lost, and the storm-lion's out of his lair,
Raging rampant with mighty roar;
And the glistening lightning flashes its glare;
And the torrents descend with a wind-driven pour.
Only the lightning to show by its fire
The tears of Heaven flooding Earth's floor;
And, above the sound of the storm-lion's ire,
Shriek the rain-sheets over the tor,
Shriek in a quavering, tuneless choir.
What's that in the distance shining afar?
See it flickering higher and higher,
Light in a broadening, lengthening bar —
Who is abroad at this lonely hour?
Or is it a cottage high on the scar?
Or does it shine in My Lady's tower
To guide her Lord from lands afar?
Nearer and nearer, I haste — Oh, for power
To reach that light — Oh, to be sure,

My Lady would welcome me in her bower —
I fall; I sink; it was the marsh's lure —

December 26, 1911.

WHEN ON THE SHORE GRATES MY BARGE'S KEEL

Weariness, weariness, unending weariness, cease —

Break thou the heart thou canst not heal!

Bitterness, bitterness, undying bitterness, peace —

On shore bring to rest my barge's keel,

On that shadowy shore, we seek at life's release;

For thy soul, belovèd, bears Death's seal.

Restlessness, restlessness, wandering restlessness
haunts me;

Lacking thy smile, all life's brooklets congeal
Into one image emotional, fearful which daunts
me —

Life's frozen image without an ideal.

Ceaselessly, ceaselessly, ceaselessly, mocking, life
taunts me;

Gone all my former purpose and zeal.

Thou wert the pattern that ordered my hopes, my
existence;

All that life meant to me, thou didst reveal —
And now thou art gone, all my nature is lacking
subsistence —

Oh, let this soul from the body steal!

Then to the spectres, Plutonian, silent, ethereal,

Will my sad spirit for thine appeal,

Wandering onward, and onward through realms
immaterial

Till at thy feet shall it joyously kneel —
Then must my weariness, weariness, weariness,
cease;

Mended the heart, life could not heal —
Bitterness, bitterness, ended all bitterness, peace —
When on the shore grates my barge's keel.

January 25, 1911.

TO SHELLEY

Shelley, thy spirit is set among the stars;
Exalted from the earth, thy soul sprang high
From these drab pavements to the star-lit sky;
In one grand ecstasy, frail mortal bars
Gave 'way; thy soul purged pure of earthly
scars —

No more to languish here with lingering sigh —
Rose from the foaming gulf where thou didst lie,
Rose from the ragged sail and splintered spars,
Rose to Elysium's fairest bowers serene;
There thine Ideal is ever at thy side;
And soft Apollo's hand doth strike the strings;
And Philomel, behind a bowery screen,
Pours forth Anacreon's blessings on thy bride
Who to thine ear unceasing rapture sings.

July 29, 1911.

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

Through life he strove to reach his longed-for
goal,
Living secluded in a forest dell;
It was his wish to learn himself so well
As to command the secrets of the soul;
He studied, wrote, and fashioned out life's scroll
Until the spirit's instincts could he spell;
And then at last ^{my} diapason swell,
Burst forth his writings, 'round the world to roll!
As organ music sighs through cloistered aisle,
As mighty calms upon the waters steal,
As raging, shrieking tempest-blasts assail;
So doth his magic word our minds beguile
Until, swept onward by each peal on peal,
Our souls are lured beyond this mortal veil.

February 4, 1912.

THE VISION OF DANTE

Upon my breast there weighed ten thousand
waves

Of black, unthinkable despair; I floated
In atmosphere of leaden density,
In atmosphere that burned with heat, yet glowed
not —

Then scintillating stars with vivid flashes,
Like sparks from steel struck in a mine's thick
blackness,

Tortured my eyes with dazzling glare; and then
Arose a rumbling as of crashing tombs
When the dead waken. Gone my will, my power.
I could nor feel, nor move, nor cry. Creation
Seemed rending downward through eternal space.
The thundering ceased, there shot a wail of pain,
A wail more anguished than arose from Troy
When Hector fell. Fainter, it grew, receding
Through the spheres. The meteors flashed no
more.

I floated upward on invisible wings;
The distance purpled in the glow of dawn;
Funereal clouds melted to shimmering gray;
And far away the notes of music sounded,
Echoing onward to Infinity —
Music celestial of that choir of Heaven
Which sings unendingly about His throne.

Distant, it floated, yet how pure, and clearer
Than clear, rebounding Alpine notes. A present
Foretaste of the sublime beatitudes;
And o'er my visual sky moved forms of beings,
Dark forms in solemn, slow-ascending flight
Toward that rich, purple glow. The vision
changed:

So pure the light that darkness sealed my eye-
lids!

So grand the symphony, I could not hear!
The whole cathedral-vault of Heaven rang
In awful majesty of perfect tone;
And 'past my mortal vision, in endless tide,
Flowing, and flowing upward toward the Light,
Angels innumerable, many-hued,
Winged on, majestic, to the music's time,
Winged on and sang a ceaseless Hallelujah —

February 16, 1912.

THE SPIRIT OF SCHOPENHAUER

Rush on, rush on, humanity, and fill
Your hours with toil-wrought pain. Rush on,
rush on

Upon your prizeless race. Where is your gain
In luxury, or seas of swimming gold,
Or starry ether chained to conquerdom?
You do but add new wheels, new chains to man's
Machine to govern man. You build a tower
More high than Babel's, hoping for earthly
heaven

Upon this structure formed of luxuries,
And squander here stored-up celestial bliss
Which your poor Wills would mortgage before
gained.

Your little lives were never made for racks
And fettered strainings of this new-wrought world
That quivers your nerves with life-intensity.
Death marks your race upon his hour-glass;
And Madness moves upon your city streets.
Your fevered minds reel downward to the gulf
Where knowledge fails, and luxuries lose charm,
Where passion flickers out, and haste seems slow.

Rush on, rush on, destruction marks your goal.
Rush on, rush on, till Death has breathless felled
The last of all your human progeny;
And leaves him lying there alone — alone,

Like him who first had shape of man — unburied,
Lost in a race with no competitor,
And nothing as the goal — unburied, staring
At the passing clouds, his only winding-sheet.
And then the Great Intelligence — if such
There be — will see his moment's pastime o'er,
And turn his arts to other constellations,
Until in rolling æons e'en his mind
May lose the memory of Man which *was* —

Rush on, rush on, humanity, and fill
Your hours with toil-wrought pain, rush on, rush
on!

Death is your hope, your pilot, and your goal,
And Nothingness your only consolation —

April 26, 1911.

ARTHUR TO GUENEVER

O Guenever, O Guenever once mine,
God may assoil thy failing, but can I
Whose quivering soul is blasted, and whose sky
Is tempest-rent in agony? — Ah, thine,
Thine might have been the fire that should refine
My table round to silver chastity,
Lofty ensample to mine Hall. Oh, why
Should thy soft light no longer purely shine
For my parched soul to bathe in? Guenever,
My Guenever, yet thou wert only mortal —
So too am I; and shall thy every tear
Of anguish well, and I not mark? O hear,
And help me, God, to open wide the portal
Of pardon in my heart for Guenever —

April 10, 1912.

THE DEATH OF THOMAS CHAT- TERTON

A gutted wick, still flutteringly aflame
Upon a roughened bench — bare walls, bare
floor,
And glimmering gray of sunrise — yes, and
more —

Ah, brother, for I call thee by that name —
Mine eyes tear-blinded to thy figure came,
Thy figure fallen like a flower when hoar
Frosts blight. Thy soul wont like the lark to
soar

The light-flushed dawn, now takes a loftier aim.
Thy funeral chant, the slow-entoning wind;
Thy churchèd tomb, the pillared vault of morn;
Thy requiem, the birds: Thus art thou dead,
Pale, spectred want, thy tribute from thy kind;
But God, himself, thy dirges shall adorn
With sighing psalms of every wind that's sped.

May 8, 1912.

A SPRING SONG

The air is vibrant with a sensuous charm;
The grasses nod, and drowse beneath the sun;
Dim, swelling tones upon the breezes run.
In soft security from dread alarm,
The doves are cooing; and the wind with warm
Caress, bears the arbutus' missive, one
Love-wrought line of scented rapture, none
Subtler to woo the honey-hunting swarm.
Let me sigh out my soul in ecstasy,
And breathe forth all the fragrance of my being
Upon the slowly-stirring summer air;
Let me no longer merely scent, hear, see;
But *one* with Nature, in that Law agreeing —
That God-willed Law that tincts the Beauty
there —

May 18, 1912.

AFTER THE NEO-PLATONISTS

Night wove her web across the sun that died
In crimson colors; velvet-falling gloom
Hung curtain-wise, and, like some rich perfume,
Formed the soft essence of each wind that sighed.
Out of my casement through the dark, I spied
The moon afloat in tide of golden spume
Like some fair flower opening into bloom;
The earth lay dim; the Heavens starry-eyed;
And breezes softer than a maiden's breath
Hushed all the air. O night, how sweet thy
charm!

Yet not thy moon, nor stars, nor wind, each one
Of these shall pass when we are changed by
death —

But rather sleep, thou death-in-life, more warm
Yet not so sweet as sweet oblivion.

September 18, 1912.

WHAT WOULDST THOU BE?

What wouldst thou be? A cloud upon the air
Of summer skies afloat in sunlit charm,
And drinking azure bliss, all free from care,
And nestling near the sun's breast rich and warm?
What wouldst thou be? A comet, trailing eyes
Of thousand terrors through the throbbing night,
And filling earth with fear and vague surprise
To gaze upon thy bright, liquescent light?
What wouldst thou be? A sullen, stalwart cliff
Immovable upon a grassy plain,
Kissed by no clouds, and cold, and stark, and stiff,
Unmelted by the gentle tears of rain?
I ask nor to be gay, nor great nor strong —
Make me a thought incarnate in some song.

May 24, 1912.

THE PROPHECY OF DAVID

A METRICAL SHORT-STORY

I

“The prophecy is overthrown at last!
Thy hopes, my fury-tempered steel shall blast.
Mine, mine, thou art; David, thou shalt not rule.
This curse upon my seed is overpassed;
And he who made it was some dream-crazed fool
Whose soul was such poor stuff as could not mast
Futurity’s wide ocean. David shall be
All fetter-bound, my captive prisoned fast!”

Before his tent, King Saul in triumph strode;
About Prince David circled his array.
E’er the new sun had sipped the dew, would he
Close on the fugitive.—“Brain-crazing thirst
Of jealousy that drives me on my way
Of torment, drain this cup; and satiate be.
Thy hope, O line of David, fadeth fast
Like pallid starlight into morning cast.”

Saul triumphed to the stars; he gasped for air
As one might gasp upon a mountain’s height.
Revenge and hate swept storm-like through the
lair
Where lurked his soul shrinking before the blast;
“Mine, mine, by high-enthroned Jehovah’s
might!”

The words upon his lips were hot and fast.—
Thine, thine, thou say'st? Him shalt thou never
gain!

Thou dream'st a dream, O King; it is in vain.
Once fixed, the star of forecast cannot wane.
Thine, thine, thou say'st? It is in vain, in vain.—
Was it the echo tortured into shape
Of his own words? Still stood the King aghast.
Did all this prisoning world leave no escape
From evil prophecy to his sworn vow?

He clapped his hands. (How the two
sounds contrast!)

A servant came who cringed before his brow.
“Whence came that sighing voice? Let no one
go

About my tent.” The man was silent. “Now,
My Lord?” he quavered. “All has been quite
still.”

Saul's forehead frowned: “Return to rest — Or
no,

Order my men to muster; 'tis my will
To seize the enemy at once, before
The light of morn. Soon shall I hold my foe;
And when he's bolted safe by gates thick-brassed,
Then may my fury gorge its dread repast.”
Again he smiled. Footsteps approached in sore,
Short-tempered strides as one who comes from
far.

Still paused the servant for Saul's nod to go —
And Saul was smiling to the moon's curved bar.

“My Lord, my Lord, these tidings brook
no pause!”

As if unwillingly, the King turned slow.

“Philistines plunder thy rich-garnered grain,
And flood thy fenced towns with waves of fire!
The land is overswept with bloody rain;
Thy towered throne is tottering to the mire!”

Saul's fingers clenched until the blood was
near;

He turned away; the moon was hid from sight.
Only upon Prince David's men one gleam
Pierced through the gloomy, cypress-shaded
night.

“Lost, lost — so near, and yet in vain, in
vain —”

His enemy who should displace his son,
Would still live on while he must go and fight
To save the realm — save, for this hated one?
He spoke; his voice was tense: “Awake my men;
We must be marching far.” A lightening beam
Of anguish flashed and re-flashed through his
brain;

And back there floated in his oral ken:

“Once fixed, the star of forecast cannot wane;
Thine, thine, thou say'st? Him shalt thou never
gain!”

II

Encamped Philistines lay upon the plain
While Israel held the barren hillock's rise.
Like palm trees in the waste, their gay tents shone;
And many camp-fires vied with sunset skies,
Yet fewer on the hills than blazed below
Down in the darkening valley where had grown
As many flickering lights as flakes of snow
That fall on wintry Lebanon.

Alone

Before his tent, strode Saul; his head was bowed
As bows a palm tree to the tempest blast.
Was this deep thought? Or was the spirit cowed
By some high-topping terror? Then at last
Tensely he spoke as to the blackening cloud
That hung above the sunset: "I, so strong,
Yet cannot banish thee, ill-omened shroud,
That round my writhing soul wraps as a pall
Of mute foreboding? — He and Philistine join
In lowering hate against me on the plain —
God, God, my soul has sought Thy soul; wherein
But Thine Omnipotence can triumph lie?
Yet Thou art wordless.— Shall the King still call
Unto the Silent?"

The clouds were scudding fast
As if breathed through the Heavens by God's
sigh.

There turned his eyes; then o'er the valley cast.
" Yet will I win," he cried. " Fate cannot last.
The days are all at odds; the powers conspire
To crush my mortal Will. Oh, I will cast,
And trample dim foreboding in the mire!
Let Fate come on; I'll meet him half the way;
And win ——" Ceased in the air his words.

Sudden,

The sky grew dark; a frail gust stirred the fire,
Filling the air with monotone of woe:
" Thou dream'st a dream; it is in vain, in vain;
Him never shalt thou gain ——" The sound
was flown.

With features fury-tortured, hands clenched fast,
Up leaped he, straining arms stretched forth.

" My foe

I'll rend, rend, rend; hear me ye breeze's blast!
My royal root shall bloom; and David — lost.
Jehovah's evil Providence, I'll cast
Into a sea embalmed in endless frost!"

III

A witch dwelt high upon stern Endor's cliff.
The place was dark: for night had drawn the
veiling
Between the mountain peaks that stand still, stiff,
The frozen sentinels of Time; and sailing

Aloft upon the evening air, the smoke
Of hostile camp-fires blackened e'en the night.
Here dwelt this hag to horrid witchcraft given,
A withered, fangless thing whose mutterings spoke
Of all the secrets of Hell's shadow-light.
The wind was coldly wailing. Near her fire,
She crouched. Behind her, through a passage
riven

By some swift thunderbolt of wrath divine,
Appeared a man in closely wrapped attire.

Like some lithe snake she turned and cringed
In fear and yet in anger: "By what sign,
And wherefore come you here?" her lips half
snarled.

The man unwrapped his mantle deeply fringed;
He threw a purse before her. "For this cost,
Let thine unseen familiar call from rest
The one I name to thee"—She rose all gnarled;
And thus she spake: "Seek not to hide thy mien;
My spirit tells me that thou art—" Her lean
Hand grasped the splintered rock—"Thou art
the King!

And whom wouldst thou, my Lord, seek in this
fane

Of Chaldee calculations, law and ring?"
"Serve me but well to-night; and be thou wise—
 Charm as I bid; and gratitude shall last
All time from me to thee—fulfill this quest—"

He paused his speech and glanced to either side —
“Summon me Samuel. Let his spirit rise
Upon the night in wreathèd, hazy guise.”

The fire-embers faded red, and died;
King Saul sat staring into sable space;
The witch was mumbling by the fire-side
Whence curled up wisps of smoke. His heart
beat fast.

Within the gray appeared a dim-lit face.
In silent terror gazed the King. At last,
Was audible a voice upon the wind:
“What would'st thou, Saul? What would'st
thou learn from me?”

“Samuel, 'tis thou —” and then, as in a gust
The storm sweeps down upon the plain, words
burst

In hot-lipped passion uncontrolled and fast —
“Aid me; O, aid me; for I yearn, I thirst
To drink this David's blood. The frenzied lust
Of unfulfilled ambition desert-dry
Burns in my throat. Is my seed barren cast
On earth? Am I condemned to plod, a beast
For any burden? Spectre, tell me why
Should I be King of men, and yet the least
Who cannot even hold or give mine own?”

“The princely David shalt thou never gain;
Thou dream'st a dream, O King, it is in vain —
Once fixed, the star of forecast cannot wane —

The star of forecast cannot wane — wane —
wane —”

The spectre's voice swept on upon the wind;
The spectre faded into argent gloom.

Down shot a nacreous moonbeam dim-outlined.

The King's eyes fell upon the armed plain.

There rose a shout again, and yet again —

Below was movement, battling of armed men,

And shrieking clash of arms. How fiercely
shines

That flaring light! His camp was sheathed in
flame!

In flame that wrote upon his soul the lines:

“Once fixed the star of forecast cannot wane;

Thine all has been in vain, in vain, in vain —”

April and May, 1912.

THE PROPHECY OF SAINT MARK

A METRICAL SHORT-STORY

Pale night upon its swift, aërial loom
Wove the soft, vaporous substance of the gloom.
The story-sculptured Gothic porch lay dim
And silent in drab haze with which the spring
Covers its carpentry of summer bloom.

A maiden stood within the porch's pale.
"It is the night," she sighed, "Saint Marcus' night
When ghosts of all foredoomed to sickness wing
Into the church to pray; so runs the tale.
Those who make no return shall feel the grim,
Fell scythe of Death within the year. The light
Must flicker up each face as past they sail.
But Gascon, O my Gascon, shalt thou die?
Year after year, I wait — Thy strong-wrought
mail
Surely is sword-proof —" And a hovering sigh
Passed through her lips more still than silence,
frail.

The lowering mist grew darker. From the
womb
Of day, young night was born. The paling light
Was flecked with haze-clouds flickering in the
gloom;
And to and fro in stately pageantry,

Strange shadow-shapes like liquid-silver spume
Charmed into lightness, formed an imagery
Of things half-human.

Still the maiden pale
Waited and hung upon each shadowy trail
Of lingering vapors fainting to and fro.
They took the shape of flitting forms in mail
Or monkish cowl. A Merlin-magic spell
Seemed laid upon her. "And art *thou* to go?"
She whispered as some well-known face amid
The rest swept by her through that portal fell.
And some, not marked for Death, returned again;
And some returned not. O'er the porch's rail,
Leant her light body as she scanned each form,
And tensely looked with terror anxious-eyed.

Why does she shrink with all-consuming pain,
And seek to gaze again? A blinding storm
Of anguish breaks upon her. "O what doom
Is this for thee and me? Why doest thou glide
Into this silent, terror-freighted tomb?"
Pale Gascon's figure fled along the tide —
Some forms not marked for Death returned
again;

But his returned not. Ever anguish-eyed,
She paused and waited — waited in the gloom.
At last the flying cloud flakes ceased to come;
And stilly night arose. "My God, to whom
May I turn now? My richest Self is rent!"

Down from the carven doorway stumbling
slow,
The maiden passed, silent with languishment.
Forth from the darkness stepped a man. All
dumb,
She gazed in careless stupor such as woe
Stamps on the soul.

“My Lady, may I dare —”
He paused, and gazed, bowed sweepingly and
low,

Then spoke again. She stood there sad and fair,
Quivering like a heat-cloud in the air.

“Lady, a traveler asks the way to where
He may find rest and lodgement.” One brief
while,

She stayed herself in stupor; 'tis but meet,
A soul come slowly from behind the veil.

“Come — come,” she said, upon her face a smile
Of sorrow blent with some strange joyance pale.

They passed along the quaintly cobbled
street,
And then turned through a lane where high up-
reared,

The gloomy oaks and hawthorne hedges greet
The eye on either hand. A cottage stood
With banks of sleepy flowers at its feet;
And all around, the giant, hoary wood

Frowned down its shadows on the garden's
bloom,

Frowned down, a fateful harbinger of gloom.

Within the cottage, all was warmth and
cheer.

There stayed the mother waiting the return
Of her sweet child. They entered. She did
greet

Both with an all-inclusive smile, and clear,
Unchanging peace and kindliness that burn
Before a pure soul's shrine. "Whom have we
here,

Marie? — Some houseless stranger gone
astray?"

He doffed his feathered cap and bowed full
low.

"After long twilight wanderings in despair
Of any hermitage for night, not far
From here, I prayed your daughter's guidance ere
The dark should leave me but a chance faint star
By which to fare."

Beside the oaken board,
They sat and ate the rustic dishes there,
While young Sir Guy poured forth a glittering
hoard

Of warriored stories gathered far away:
How one brave knight pierced twenty paynim
through;

And how another fled from the affray
To be enslaved by Sarazain corsair.

The maiden hungered for each word. How
frail

Be warriors' lives! Upon the thought, she knew
A bitter memory of forecast's gloom.

Oh, she must fly. Oh, something must avail
To give her refuge from this festering sting.
She tried to turn her mind from sorrow's trail,
And gave her thoughts to the narrator's tale.

Now he was speaking of a lord who strove
To win his lady; but the Christian war
Called him to battle for his Faith. He clove
Damascus steel and clinking casques; but e'er
He could return — Sir Guy then ceased; for here
Arose a warning on the mother's brow.
She wished no bitter recollections. Fear
For Marie's plausance was her only care.
Soon all the cottage slept 'mid the garden's bloom;
And fatefully the forest frowned its gloom.

The summer blossomed, faded, and then
died;

And still as if enchanted, stayed he there.
They took long walks o'er lonely hill and dale,
And went across the fields with flowers pied.
At times their voices rang upon the air;
But ever when they came upon that vale
Where, in its flowery charm, the cottage stood,

Their talk would fail within the vasty wood.
Thus bathed their souls in summer's sultry tide
Like flashing moths upon the wind that ride.

And hectic autumn came and brought its
charm

Of leafy brilliance heralding its death.
Beside the evening blaze, full many a tale
He told of knights in chivalrous career;
But never raised the fluttering alarm
Of the maiden's mother by the faintest breath
Of the warrior lord and his loved one dear.
Then hoary, chilling winter shrouded pale,
Came, and passed by: thus wandered on, the year.

The spring was coldly wrapped in sullen
haze;

Even the mounting sun seemed scarce as warm
As during winter. Slowly passed the days
Until the Eve of blest Saint Marcus came.
Among the misty-shadowed forest ways,
Sir Guy did bring the maiden arm in arm.
How oft the times that they had done the same —

“ I've lived a life, careless and debonair,
And know nor fettering bonds nor fear;
Yet would I leave it all without a care — ”
She upward glanced and then glanced down as
pale

As any flowing haze-wreath in the gloom.
“ Oh, what is that? ” she cried. The misty veil

Parted and showed a glimpse of rock-built wall.
“ ’Tis but the village kirk,” he said. A pall
Of haze enwrapped them like the Will of Doom.
She stood and faced him, quivering as a sail
That blows uncertain in a varying wind.
“ Marie, Marie,” he faltered. Then a flare
Of passion burnt his soul out in his eyes.

Downward she glances seeming unaware;
But in her heart beneath the outward guise,
Warring emotions make her spirit quail.
Gascon’s loved image into vision flies;
And yet her rising love, she cannot quell
For brave Sir Guy; and then, as when the flail
Lashes the chaff, dim mist before her flies
Into the church in Gascon’s image pale.
The year is out. What then, should *he* avail?
“ Marie — ” Sir Guy is breathing on the air;
She reads the rest within his flaming eyes.

“ Yes — yes,” she murmurs.

“ O despair, despair!

I have no hope; you fell into the snare!”
His eyes dilated with mad light, he cries.
“ I, I am Gascon whose memory you dare
To flout for any knight who stays a year
Within your sight! I am undone. My doom
Is set. These fateful forests be my bier!
Your lover is a wreath of shadowy air —
Go, search him in the western tempest’s lair!

For me, I hasten from this mortal gloom,
Sound mine own knell, and say mine own last
doom! ”

She shrinks away, with inward tumult pale.
His voice is still. She hears a something fall.
With anguish in her eyes, she turns. There, all
Stretched out upon the ground, he lies. A well
Of ruby richness pulses with his frail,
Departing breath. In Merlin-magic spell
Of agony, she stares into the gloom.

Pale figures, children of the mist-waves'
womb

In through the church's doorway seem to sail;
Spectral, they vanish in their destined tomb.
She moves; she starts; she cries, as one to whom
Has come the horrid messenger of doom:
“ Is that *my* figure floating in the gloom?
Shall my life fail; is this its funeral knell? ”
Pale night upon his swift, ærial loom,
Wove the soft, vaporous substance of her doom.

September and October, 1912.

THE ÆOLIAN HARP

Into my wildly whispering heart,
His song the warm sirocco sings,

Whirring, whirring —

And all the artifice of mine art
Comes on the wind by the wind to part,
Part from my whirring strings —

Sometimes I sing a wild, weird tale
That like a wandering phantom wings

Whirring, whirring —

And sometimes only a lonely wail
Wells as an echo all wildly frail,
Frail as my whirring sings —

My notes are like the willow-wands
That lightly wave before, behind.—

Whirring, whirring —

Each whispering harp-string ever responds,
Slave of the breeze in his servile bonds,
Slave of the whirring wind —

Soft the sirocco sighs his tune,
And a waning, funeral chant it wings —

Whirring, whirring —

The song shall die as joys die — soon,
Whelming its melody into a swoon,
Swoon of the whirring strings —

October 24 & 25, 1912.

THE MAID THAT I WOODED

AN ODE IN MINIATURE

I lie upon my couch by night,
And dream, and dream —
Until the quavering shadow-light
Her portraiture doth seem —
Until the breeze's moaning saith
In limpid-lapping stream,
The same denial she answereth.

I lie upon my couch by night,
And yearn, and yearn —
Until the flickering breeze's flight
Bring kisses that would burn —
Until my soul could moan with pain —
Oh, wherefore should she spurn
My love again, and yet again?

I toss upon my couch by night;
I yearn; I yearn —
Until I see the glimmering light
Upon the east return —
Until with passion-pulsing breath,
I pray my lady stern:
"Oh, let me win thee, sweetest Death —"

December 27, 1912.

IN A MINOR CHORD

AN ODE IN MINIATURE

I gave my soul to dreams sense-glorified;
I bathed in bliss-exhaling balm.
I sailed through boundless ether Tyrian-dyed,
And breathed the luscious calm.
Tense were my heart-strings tuned;
And, madly quavering as I sighed,
Their music sadly waxed and wailed — then
 swooned,
And floated feebly down in ebbing tide.

I gave my soul to battle. I defied
All the unlovable in life;
I could have bartered Heavenly bliss and died
Willingly in-the strife!
To elevate mankind,
Mine inward power, I strove to guide;
I harnessed the puissance of the mind,
And toward that end all be magnified!

I gave my soul to dreams sense-glorified
Till sated pleasure sank to pain.
I gave my soul to battle. I defied
The sordid; but in vain —
Still, still, my spirit wept;
Its goal was hopeless, deified.
Oh, would this saddened soul had ever slept
Unborn; for slumber is a painless guide.

December 3, 1912.

A GLASS OF ABSINTHE

AN ODE IN MINIATURE

It lay within a glass of green,
A sinuous glass of subtle green.
It sparkled with a slimy sheen.
A languorous fascination gleamed
With glint of lapis lazuli;
And from its silken surface streamed
The scent of musk from Araby.
Ah — was that music only dreamed
That tinct the drowsy scene?
And was my fancy false, or seemed
The glass to lure me with its limpid green?

My fingers fluttered to the stem,
To kiss the fluted, serpent stem,
As pious Persians kiss the hem,
Enwove with many a wanton trick,
Of Persia's deified Sofi.
I could not see; the light seemed thick
As perfume from the balsam-tree,
Or incense in a basalic
When sounds a requiem.
I drank the draught; my sense was sick;
My quivering fingers crushed the curling stem.

I dropped the cup of crystal-green;
I scattered fragments emerald-green —
False emeralds with a glassy sheen.
Upon the pavement, how they gleamed!
I flung the bits of serpent-stem
Upon the table beryl-seamed.
I swept them with my garment's hem —
Some say I laughed — That night, I dreamed
Of Araby — a scene
Of sleepy charm whence fragrance streamed;
And in mirage, the desert blossomed green.

January 16, 1913.

THE PALACE OF PAIN

A CYCLE

I

A soul was once incarnate in a man;
And this unseen, incarnate thing was mine;
And, as my body grew, the soul began
To sip more fondly of the scented wine
And sugared blisses life can give at call.
It languished amid luxuries divine
Showering richly like the leaves that fall
Upon the sensuous-silent autumn air.
Pale, fleeting Pleasure took my thoughtless all;
For love, unselfish, passion-fervid, rare,
Vibrated through the discords of dull time,
Blending them into harmony; for where
Life jangled harsh, a mother's care would chime
More blissful chords than can be told in rime.

II

The gentle harmonies of love declined,
And swooned into a dull, funereal moan,
And faintly floated onward with the wind.
The symphony was gone; I stayed alone
In all-enshrouding, opiate sadness bound.
I did not scream; I did not weep nor groan.
My soul was locked in stupor whence it found
Only barred gates across dim vaults; and jangling,
Discordant chaos stung me like a wound.
I could not think; I could not hope; the wrangling
Of jarring sounds oppressed me till my brain
Was lost within a labyrinth, all-entangling —
But this I learned although my powers did wane;
That Love through Death transmutes itself to
pain.

III

I sank my soul upon a sea of dreams;
I floated through aërial heights divine
Where saffron clouds a-glint with amber beams
Shimmering strangely, stretched in shining line.
I winged my way to Heaven's very dome,
And on Hell's portal read the horrid sign;
I danced upon the wavelet's crested foam,
And swept tempestuous on the stormy wind.
On earth like some vague terror, did I roam
While moaning misery pursued behind.
Whene'er I sang, my song had one refrain
With anxious care and artifice refined,
Until my soul's accompaniment would wane
And wax to one *motiv*: unending pain.

IV

I broke my dungeon-sepulchre of dreams;
I climbed the winding stair to palace halls
Where all the air was soothed by incense-streams;
And every sight within those magic walls
Was bright with radiant, opalescent sheen
While lulling on the ear, light music falls
Of such a melody as ne'er has been
Unless by fays on fairy lyres played.
There Pleasure gowned in iridescent green,
Reclines upon her couch with gems inlaid,
And gently beckons with a sinuous arm —
But all the sumptuous excesses fade;
The walls seem dim; the music has no charm,
For Pleasure's Palace is a place of harm.

V

I plunged through rooms of deepest Tyrian dye;
 I tore the veils from mysteries aside;
 But grinning pleasure ever met mine eye.
 In anguished ecstasy of bliss, I cried;
 And through the halls, I heard the echo wane
 Until the last, most distant answer sighed:
 "The spirit of the world is pain, pain, pain —"
 Then from the drowsy distance, there did well
 A voice as of a witch before her fane,
 Soft-muttering, some Heaven-blasting spell:
 "The world is all in vain, the merest tool
 Of accident, an anteroom to Hell,
 A counterfeit but fairly glinting pool —
 Snatch all the joy thou canst, thou human fool!"

VI

And then I searched within myself to find
The *how* and *why* of all I heard and saw.
I found but silent Nothing. Wearied, blind,
I strove to learn the omnipresent Law
On whose foundation all these chambers lean.
I found within the artifice no flaw;
And not the slightest secret could I glean.
I searched the winding, labyrinthine halls,
And scanned colossal colonnades between
Whose rows unending space is seen that palls
The straining sight, yet thither lures the eye
With fairy sheen. Through all the outer walls,
No doorway pierced to water, earth or sky:
Is there an answer to the *how* and *why*?

VII

And yet I am condemned to live, to be.
What horrid Fate decreed it? Life is blind,
And cannot see the Truth. Oh, but for me
To know, to solve this riddle of the mind!
And yet no whisper through the age's gloom
Has taught the latent answer that I pined;
And finally in a sombre-tinted room,
I sank in languor on the marble floor,
And faintly wondered at my destined doom.
Upon my weary spirit, came once more
A faint remembrance of a former time,
A faint remembrance, I had known before,
That clung about me like an ancient rime:
Death is to the soul but a change of clime.

VIII

Then from the body tear this soul away!
Let me seek death; I'll force the hand of Fate!
I will not suffer more. The game I play
Is held against Creation, and the weight
Of all the ages hangs with Fate. Serene,
Stands Death in sable gossamer bedight,
And with maternal arms would intervene,
And seeks to press me silent to her breast.
Quick, let me free my soul from pain! The scene
Is fair — Oh, let this weariness be blest!
But hold — I still may keep this bitter strain
Of self-tormenting torment e'en in rest —
Death summons up the things of life again;
And pain of life transmutes all death to pain.

IX

Oh, but to float away upon the night,
To lose my soul upon her silent dark,
To feel myself a Nothing, a frail, light,
Aërial Emptiness, a fleeing spark
Of sunshine seeking on the endless void,
Some rest, some painless silence as its mark.
Like an oblivion-destined asteroid,
So would I that my soul should haste away
From all the ordinary, earthly, cloyed,
From all the tawdriness of living day;
But still I know I cannot cease to be,
Though I condemn my body back to clay —
O thrice accursèd immortality
That dooms me life through all Eternity!

X

O maddening horror in a smiling guise!
Alive or dead, I am a slave to life.
The later torment with the former vies
To wring my still-undying soul with strife.
I have a debt; the creditor is Time:
"My bond, my bond," he cries, and holds the
knife
To wound yet never kill. But what my crime?
I fled those pleasure-haunted halls where vile,
Sweet-scented blisses soothed to pain. A clime
More active came within my ken. The dial
Of hours hurried round. The rich, new wine
Of busy life, I found. A steady file
Swept past of mortal things with souls like mine —
Yet what the purpose of their streaming line?

XI

With nervous yearning, haste they on their way:
A few direct and rule the work of all;
But most are bringing mortar, stone and clay —
(And some there are that rise, and others fall;
And they are seen no more — we know not why.)
But all are working on the palace wall;
And some invent designs to please the eye;
And some would fain extend the rooms to win
New-fashioned blisses. A soft-moaning cry
Is vibrant in the air. High-pitched and thin,
It quavers dimly, then descends again,
And echoes aimless through the busy din:
Mankind would add to pleasure, but in vain —
For Pleasure's Palace is a house of pain.

XII

They strive; they strive, heap luxury on bliss,
And worship Pleasure as their goddess-queen.
Ah, take who will the subtle harlot's kiss!
Yes, seize thy moment's sweetness — then, I
 ween,

A pageantry of pain, such throbbing throes
As rive the soul, and cut the quick with keen,
Imprisoned edges till the life-blood flows.
Man little knows it; but two aims has he:
By present anguish, store up future woes,
By present anguish, pain posterity.
The quest for pleasure is a quest in vain;
Pleasure is Nothing in Eternity.
Men rather act than think, for thought is pain,
And action is the opiate of the brain.

XIII

Shall I play Roman, face and fight these ills,
Pretend that I *can* fight and still may win?
A child his dozen mimic soldiers drills,
And six with six, the battle they begin.
Some victors, and some vanquished; some he
slays —

But then the soldiers are mere toys of tin —
And carelessly upon the ground, he lays
Vanquished and victors on one common plane;
And takes some other toy and laughs and plays —
Yes, like that soldier, may I fight, and gain
Great victories. Oh, I may stare my Fate
Between the eyes, and drink whole draughts of
pain;
With Stoic-strength, may struggle, and may hate;
But where's the payment that I vainly wait?

XIV

I dare not ponder on humanity;
Myself, I dare not ponder, nor my goal.
Oh, would that I were lost upon that sea
Into whose silence, Lethe's currents roll.
Upon its bosom, would that I pressed mine,
Then might some kindly power transform this
soul

Into forgetfulness. Or would some wine
Were brewed with musk or attar of the rose
And colored with a tint incarnadine,
And so compounded that a dreamless doze
Would come from one red, richly-scented draught.
Or would that some unmoving glacier froze
My soul within its crystal mine.— No craft
Can save me from this cup of pain unquaffed.

XV

Oh, every soul is only pain embalmed;
And every torment is but bliss's sting.
Humanity lies gasping and becalmed
Upon a torrid ocean; and no wing
Of albatross is seen — nor e'er was seen —
Our worldly hope is dead — yet rules as king.
Dust, ashes, ashes, dust, upon these lean
All of the upward struggle of mankind;
And pain, unending pain, is all they glean.
Goddess of pain, O mistress of the mind,
Art thou the Soul of life? Or hast thou palmed
Thyself on men once happy? Have we pined
Forever? Can our spirits e'er be calmed;
Or *is* the spirit only pain embalmed?

XVI

But what of art? Can art no solace hold,
No soothing spikenard, soporose drug or wine
To woo the wounded soul? Must men grow old
In agony? Or has some thought divine
Slipped down upon us, cool, compassionate?
But what of art? Can art's frail power refine
Our souls into that Oversoul, and mate
The each with All in one, sublime design?
Art is the vision of that Truth innate
In man. A soul, prismatic, crystalline,
May show each glow of being with each strife
At once reflected and becalmed, and twine
Then into some new, inward world all rife
With spirit blisses of a spirit life.

XVII

Eternal art can triumph over pain;
And once we breathe the lotus-fragrance deep,
The world may scream with iron tongue in vain,
For all the argosy is soothed to sleep.
The ships may rot forever on the sand;
And far off Greece may wait and faintly weep.
More rare than spice from silken Samarkand,
More sorrow-sweet than young Francesca's tears,
More fair than yearning night upon the strand,
And more majestic than Anchises' years:
Beauty's the image, not the thing. 'Tis shod
With rainbow lightnings of the hopes and fears,
And knows each step humanity may plod.
Art is the Beauty of the face of God.

XVIII

But still I live within this place of pain;
And still I seek for an eternal aim,
For, after death, mere Beauty is in vain.
What is there deeper flowing from this same
Unceasing spring? Quick, let me tear the veil!
There sat a statue on an ebon frame —
A statue in that house of pain. So pale
The brow and still the nostrils, Death it seemed;
But in the face, I read that holy tale
That lay on the Madonna's face where gleamed
The Heavenly light from the young Christ's
aureole.
Through all the halls of pain, the brilliance
beamed;
And every discord out of chaos stole
To swell the throbbing organ's thunderous roll.

XIX

Faith is the master-spirit of the mind.
All else is vanity, the preacher saith;
And worldly knowledge painful is and blind.
Oh, be thyself, and trust thyself. The breath
Of God is breathed on thee. Believe, and will;
And all that thou wouldst have in life, in death,
Is thine. I heard a rustling like a rill
Upon its leafy bed — just such a sound
As tincts the shadow of a song with skill
More intricate than arabesques, and bound
With tender, faintly-flowing melodies —
But whence the choir sang, I never found.
Mayhap at last, myself may learn the ties
Wherewith are bound those lingering harmonies.

XX

And when the soul has torn the fleshly veil,
And moves majestic to that monotone,
When echo-like upon the air I sail
Whither the wingèd skylark, Faith, has flown,
And borne me fainting upward; then my soul
May seek the God of art which silent, lone,
Broods on a crystal-argent sea, the goal
Of all humanity. Incarnate pain
Is calmed to everlasting peace. There roll
No waves upon the sea. Charmed has it lain
Through incommensurate time; charmed will it
lie
Through all eternity; and there again
Upon my soul in silence wrapped, shall sigh,
Most beautiful — a mother's lullaby.

December, 1912.

January, 1913.

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